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NOTES ET/AND COMMENTAIRES/ COMMENTARIES

Ḥadīth al-'ashara or The Political Uses of a Tradition

Introduction

Ḥadīth al-'ashara is a tradition in which the Prophet Muhammad is said to have predicted the access of ten of his companions to paradise. This *ḥadīth* appears in four out of the six *ṣiḥāḥ* (1), and seems to have evolved after the death of the Prophet, when the Muslim community was grappling with issues of succession, and the Meccan immigrants were attempting to support and sustain their claim to the caliphate against the Medinese *anṣār*. Therefore, the concept of an *'ashara* and the corresponding traditions seem to denote the community's own conception of its leadership after the death of the Prophet : a leadership made of Qurayshi companions.

The first use of *ḥadīth al-'ashara* and the later re-use and propagation of the concept of an *'ashara* betray clear political intentions. This concept was later re-chanelled and re-used extensively – certainly after the tenth century – to support another political cause, namely that of political Sunnism trying to maintain itself doctrinally in the face of a growing Shi'i political and doctrinal threat. It will be shown that the increased importance of this concept, as well as the later widespread dissemination of the traditions and stories about the *'ashara* were attempts at strengthening Sunnism by projecting the idea that the Prophet had identified the *'ashara* as the leaders of the community of the Muslims after him, and thus stressing the legitimacy of the first three caliphs – who belonged to this group – against Shi'i claims to the contrary.

(1) The different versions of this *ḥadīth* appeared in the *sunan* of Ibn Māja, Abū Dāwūd, at-Tirmidhī and an-Nasā'ī, but did not appear in the *ṣaḥīḥs* of Bukhārī and Muslim.

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The Concept of an *'ashara* in the Islamic Tradition

The concept of an *'ashara* in the Islamic tradition is surely post-Quranic. It is true that the Qur'an includes certain verses that are believed to refer to the deeds and future heavenly rewards of individual companions, but these are mentioned in isolation and there is never any reference to "a group of such rewardees" (2), and the idea that there were to be *ten* blessed companions is nowhere to be found in the Qur'anic text.

The first reference to the *'ashara* is in the *ḥadīth* literature. The term, used in this sense, is derived from three prophetic traditions and their variations. These traditions, although reaching us through a number of different chains of *isnād*, go back to the testimony of two companions, 'Abd ar-Rahman b. 'Awf and Sa'id b. Zayd b. Nufayl.

'Abd ar-Rahman b. 'Awf's version of *ḥadīth al-'ashara*

The *ḥadīth* about the *'ashara* that is attributed to 'Abd ar-Rahman b. 'Awf is generally regarded as less reliable than the accounts attributed to Sa'id b. Zayd b. Nufayl. There are two reasons for that. First, at-Tirmidhi – while listing the different variations of *ḥadīth al-'ashara* – proclaimed 'Abd ar-Rahman b. 'Awf's version to be less reliable than Sa'id b. Zayd's versions (3).

Second, Muhib ad-Din at-Tabari – refering to this *ḥadīth* – claimed that al-Bukhari considered it to be weaker than Sa'id b. Zayd's account (4). Yet, neither al-Mizzi nor Wensinck mention al-Bukhari to have included any *ḥadīth* about the *'ashara*, which makes verifying at-Tabari's statement extremely difficult (5). In any case, 'Abd ar-Rahman b. 'Awf's version of the *ḥadīth* did not survive beyond the ninth century. The versions of the *ḥadīth al-'ashara* attributed to Sa'id b. Zayd b. Nufayl had more enduring popularity, and will – for that reason – deserve greater attention in this article.

(2) For instance, az-Zamakhsharī lists more than a dozen Qur'anic verses that he claims refer to Abū Bakr. These are Q : IV, 58 ; Q : V, 57 ; Q : IX, 41 ; Q : XXIV, 22 ; Q : XXVIII, 56 ; Q : XXXIX, 33 ; Q : XLVIII, 16 ; Q : LVI, 10 ; Q : LVI, 11 ; Q : LVII, 10 ; Q : LXVI, 4 ; Q : XCII, 6 ; Q : XCII, 17 ; Q : XCII, 18 (See, az-Zamakhsharī, *Khaṣā'iṣ al-'ashara al-kirām al-barara*, edited by Bahija Baqir al-Husni. Baghdad, Iraq : silsilat kutub at-turath, wizarat al-thaqafa wa-l-i'lam, 1968, p. 32-36, 42). Some such as Q : IX, 41, are generally recognized to refer exclusively to him.

(3) at-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, edited by 'Abd ar-Rahman 'Uthman. Medina : Muhammad 'Abd al-Muhsin al-Kutubi, n.d., Vol. 5, p. 311-312.

(4) Muḥib ad-Dīn aṭ-Ṭabarī, *ar-Riyāḍ an-naḍira fī manāqib al-'ashara*, 2nd ed. Cairo : al-maktaba al-islamiyya, 1953, Vol. 1, p. 30-31.

(5) A. J. Wensinck, *Handbook of early Muhammedan tradition*, Leiden : E. J. Brill, 1960 and al-Mizzī, *Taqrīb tuḥfat al-asbrāf bi-ma'rifat al-aṭrāf*. Beirut : Mu'assasat al-kutub ath-thaqafiyya, 1994, Vol. 1, p. 359-360, and Vol. 2, p. 238-240.

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Sa'id b. Zayd b. Nufayl's versions of *ḥadīth al-'ashara*

It is particularly interesting to mention that two listings of the *'ashara* are attributed to Sa'id b. Zayd. In the first listing, the *'ashara* includes the Prophet himself, Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman, 'Ali, Talha, az-Zubayr, Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas, Sa'id b. Zayd b. Nufayl and 'Abd ar-Rahman b. 'Awf (6). However, in the second listing – which becomes predominant in later sources – the Prophet is not included, while Abu 'Ubayda b. al-Jarrah makes the list (7).

Yet, despite this difference between the two listings, the circumstancial context of the traditions – when mentioned – is the same. In many of the variations of both listings, Sa'id b. Zayd volunteers information as to the identity of nine out of ten of the *'ashara*, and clearly insinuates to his audience that he knows the identity of the tenth. When pressed to provide information as to the identity of this last member, he would hesitate – *talakka'a* or wait until they repeated the question – and "reluctantly" declare himself to be that member. Therefore, this companion who seems to be of minor importance (8), is the source of three traditions in which he is put on a level of equality with more famous companions such as the four *Rāshidūn* caliphs.

The later popularity of the concept of an *'ashara*

There is clear evidence that the popularity of this concept of a "chosen ten" is a later development in the Islamic tradition. Even though it was touched upon as early as the ninth century in the *sunan* and *ṭabaqāt* literatures, it generally enjoyed moderate attention (9). However, the trend slowly began to change in the eleventh century when there seemed to be an increasing emphasis given to this issue in different genres of literature. In the books of *ṭabaqāt* in particular, the biographers begin to mention in their entries on each of the ten that these were promised paradise and that they belonged to the *'ashara* (10) ; and it is precisely from this

(6) See Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, edited by Muhammad Muhiddin 'Abd al-Hamid, n.p. : dar ihya' al-sunna al-nabawiyya, n.d., Vol. 4, p. 211-212 ; Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, edited by Muhammad Fuad 'Abd al-Baqi. n.p. : 'Issa al-Halabi & co., n.d., Vol. 1, p. 48 ; at-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, Vol. 5, p. 315-316.

(7) See at-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, Vol. 5, p. 311-312.

(8) For instance, Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal does not find it necessary to even include him among the *ṣaḥāba* in his *Faḍā'il aṣ-ṣaḥāba* (See Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Faḍā'il aṣ-ṣaḥāba*, edited by Wasi-Allah Muhammad b. 'Abbas. Beirut : Mu'assasat ar-risala, 1983).

(9) While Khalīfa Ibn Khayyāṭ had not found it necessary to mention in his entries information regarding who belonged to the *'ashara* (See, Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Kitāb aṭ-ṭabaqāt*, edited by Suhayl Zakkar. Damascus : wizarat ath-thaqafa wa-l-siyaha wa-l-irshad al-qawmi, 1966), Ibn Sa'd does so only in his entry on Sa'īd b. Zayd b. Nufayl credited of being the source of the *ḥadīth* listing the *'ashara* (See Ibn Sa'd, *aṭ-Ṭabaqāt al-kubra*. Beirut : dar Bayrut, 1978, Vol. 3, p. 383).

(10) The increasing emphasis on this issue in the eleventh century might be a Sunni attempt at reasserting Sunni beliefs after a period of Shi'i domination. This Shi'i domination which came as a result of the rise of Shi'i powers in different parts of the Muslim world –

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period that Sa'id b. Zayd's surviving version of the *ḥadīth al-'ashara* begins to take precedence over the other versions of this tradition ([11]). From the twelfth century onwards, entire books were devoted to the subject of *faḍā'il al-'ashara*, or the virtues of the ten ([12]), and the subject remains a popular one in modern Sunni religious literature ([13]). From that time on as well, elements of fiction began to appear in the literature to illustrate the importance of this group and enrich its legend ([14]).

The Symbolism of the number "Ten"

The choice of the number *'ashara* may also be significant in itself, since the number ten is of a legendary quality going as far back as at least the sixth century BC when it was perceived as a perfect number by Pythagoras of Samos (560-480 BC). Such symbolic meaning may have also influenced the authors of the Islamic sources.

For one thing, this seems to be the case because – as mentioned earlier – the identity of the ten individuals listed as constituting the group of the *'ashara* is not strictly constant among the different versions of the *ḥadīth*. Whereas most of the names are identical in the three listings, the name of Abu 'Ubayda b. al-Jarrah appears in two of the listings and disappears in the third where it is replaced by that of the Prophet. Yet, despite this slightly uncertain listing of names, the attribute *'ashara* remains unchanging, thus making the symbolism of the number perhaps more significant than a strictly reliable enumeration. This use of a "symoblic" num-

certainly the Fatimids – had been perceived as both ideologically and politically threatening to the Sunni political establishment.

(11) It is worth mentioning in this respect that Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, who wrote in the mid-eleventh century, is the first biographer who mentions that Abu 'Ubayda b. al-Jarrāḥ – who replaces the Prophet in Sa'īd b. Zayd's surviving list of the *'ashara* – is a member of the *'ashara*. The fact that this version of the *ḥadīth* becomes dominant, and that sources begin to stress the membership of the *'ashara* are indications of the more than religious usage of this *ḥadīth*.

(12) These include for instance, Maḥmūd b. 'Umar az-Zamakhsharī's *Khaṣā'iṣ al-'ashara al-kirām al-barara* (d. A.D. 1144) and Muḥib ad-Dīn aṭ-Ṭabarī's *ar-Riyāḍ an-naḍira fī manāqib al-'ashara* (d. A.D. 1295), as well as books on the Prophet and the *'ashara* such as 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Jammā'ilī's *Sīrat an-nabī wa aṣḥābihi al-'ashara* (d. A.D. 1203) and al-Burrī's *al-Jawhara fī nasab an-nabī wa aṣḥābihi al-'ashara* (d. A.D. 1291).

(13) Some modern books on the *'ashara* include : Maḥmūd as-Sa'īd aṭ-Ṭanṭāwī, *Min faḍā'il al-'ashara al-mubashsharīn bi-l-janna* (Cairo : al-majlis al-a'la li-l-shu'un al-islamiyya, 1976), Quranī Ṭalaba Badawī, *Jazīl al-minna fī sīrat al-mubashsharīn bi-l-janna* (Cairo : maktabat wa matba'at Muhammad 'Ali Subayh, 1974) and 'Abd al-Laṭīf 'Āshūr, *al-'Ashara al-mubashsharūn bi-l-janna* (Cairo : maktabat al-Qur'an, 1988) in Arabic, as well as several books in Urdu.

(14) Muhib ad-Din at-Tabari includes for instance a *khabar* according to which God would have united the souls of the *'ashara* before their creation and made a heavenly bird out of their radiant lights : "Ruwiya anna Allah ta'āla jama'a bayna arwāḥ al-'ashara qabla khalqihim wa khalaqa min anwāriha ṭā'iran wāḥidan wa huwa fi-l-janna" (See, aṭ-Ṭabarī, *ar-Riyāḍ an-naḍira fī manāqib al-'ashara*. Tanta, Egypt : n.p., 1953, Vol. 1, p. 29).

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ber – with inconsistent listings to support it – is not unique to the Islamic tradition. Similar usages of numerical symbolism have been noted in other religious traditions certainly with regards to the twelve disciples of Christ ([15]) and the twelve Hebrew tribes ([16]). Furthermore, the same concept of an *'ashara* has been re-used in the Islamic tradition by Ibn Tumart in his attempt to establish his mahdism and liken himself to the Prophet Muhammad. The listings of the disciples constituting his council of ten – his *jamā'a* – are not consistent, and often contain less than ten names ([17]). Thus, the symbolism of the number continued to be more important than the accuracy of the listings.

The problem with singling out the *'ashara*

The *'ashara* are note the only Muslims promised access to paradise. There are many accounts in which others – men and women – are foretold their access to paradise ([18]) : the Prophet is said to have either explicitly promised them paradise ([19]), predicted their access to paradise ([20]), or spoken of them as "people who would not be touched by fire". This applies for instance to all the fighters of Badr and to all those who gave their alliegance to the Prophet at Hudaybiyya ([21]). Thus, there is a need to explain why these *'ashara* were singled out, and what distinguished them fom the remaining paradise dwellers. The traditional explanation

(15) See E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*. Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 1985, p. 98-119, and certainly p. 373 fn. 33 ; Raymond F. Collins, "The Twelve" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Doubleday : 1992, Vol. 6, p. 670-671.

(16) See Emil G. Hirsch, "The Twelve Tribes" in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*. New York : Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1905, Vol. XII, p. 253-254.

(17) See Ibn Qaṭṭān al-Marrākushī, *Nazm al-jumān li-tartīb mā salafa min akhbār az-zamān*, edited by Mahmud 'Ali Makki. Beirut : Dar al-gharb al-Islami, 1990, p. 124-128.

(18) There are of course the "seventy thousand" Muslims who were going to enter paradise without judgment and with shining faces (See, al-Burrī, *al-Jawhara fī nasab an-nabī wa aṣḥābihi al-'ashara*, edited and annotated by Muhammad at-Tunji. Riyad, Saudi Arabia : Dar ar-Rifa'i, 1983, Vol. 1, p. 207-208). On the symbolism of the numbers seven and seventy, see Lawrence I. Conrad, "Seven and the *Tasbī'* : On the Implications of Numerical Symbolism for the Study of Medieval Islamic History", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. XXXI, p. 42-73.

(19) This is certainly the case of 'Abdallah b. Salām (See, al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ*, with the commentary of Kirmānī. Egypt : al-Matba'a al-bahiyya al-masriyya, 1937, Vol. 15, p. 52-53). This group also includes among others, the wives of the Prophet, his daughter Fāṭima (See, al-Burrī, *al-Jawhara*, Vol. 2, p. 197-198), his cousin Ja'far b. Abī Ṭālib (See, al-Burrī, *al-Jawhara*, Vol. 2, p. 200, fn. 1), his grandsons al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn (See, Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, Vol. 1, p. 44 and at-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, Vol. 5, p. 321).

(20) This is certainly the case of Bilāl b. Rabāḥ. The Prophet is said to have dreamt of him dwelling in paradise (See, at-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, Vol. 5, p. 282-283 and al-Burrī, *al-Jawhara*, Vol. 2, p. 122). This is also the case of Zayd b. Ṣawḥān al-'Abdī whose access to paradise is said to have also been predicted by the Prophet (See Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā al-Baṣrī, *Waq'at al-jamal*, edited by Sheikh Muhammad Hasan al-Yasin. Baghdad : Min Nafa'is Makhtutat dar al-kutub al-Zahiriyya fi Dimashq, 1970, p. 44).

(21) See for example, Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, Vol. 4, p. 213.

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which attempts to explain this appellation by the fact that these were the only ten companions whose access to paradise was predicted in one and the same *ḥadīth* (22) is not convincing. For one thing, it does not explain the obvious greater growth in the popularity of this specific *ḥadīth* about these individuals bound to heaven as opposed to other traditions dealing with other people bound to heaven.

Why it could be a list of prospective caliphs

The exclusion of certain famous companions from the listing of "the ten" hints to the political significance of this *ḥadīth*. It is significant to note that those constituting the *'ashara* were all men who did or could have played a role of political leadership in the community after Muhammad because they were all still alive at the death of the Prophet and they all belonged to Quraysh. They could therefore all be "prospective leaders", and the list of the *'ashara* might have simply been the list of those whom the community deemed worthy of succeeding the Prophet Muhammad.

In fact, upon close examination, it seems strange that none of the companions who died before the Prophet – despite the fact that many of them were almost unanimously acclaimed for their deeds – made it to the listing of the *'ashara*. This includes such prestigious companions as the Prophet's uncle Hamza, who died in the Battle of Uhud and who is usually proclaimed as *Sayyid ash-Shuhadā'*, i.e., Lord of the Martyrs, yet is not included in any of the listings of the ten. Thus, the selection process might have been very simple : A dead companion cannot succeed ; thus, there is no point in including him on a list of "prospective" caliphs.

The Qurayshi *'ashara* and the political significance of this *ḥadīth*

It is interesting that the ten men listed as belonging to the *'ashara* were all Qurayshis (23). Variations of both 'Abd ar-Rahman b. 'Awf and Sa'id b. Zayd's listings of the *'ashara* – 'Abd-ar-Rahman's listing which excludes the Prophet from the *'ashara* (24) and both versions in the case of Sa'id b. Zayd (25) – actually specify within their *matn* that there were to be *'ashara min Quraysh fi-l-janna* rather than just any *'ashara fi-l-janna*. This information might not seem important at first

(22) See Kirmānī's commentary on Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Vol. 15, p. 53.

(23) Actually, Muḥib ad-Dīn aṭ-Ṭabarī tries to emphasize the common ancestry that the *'ashara* share with the Prophet. See, aṭ-Ṭabarī, *ar-Riyāḍ*, Vol. 1, p. 27-28.

(24) See Muḥib ad-Dīn aṭ-Ṭabarī, *ar-Riyāḍ*, Vol. 1, p. 30-31.

(25) See *Kitāb uṣūl an-niḥal* of an-Nāshi' al-Akbar as edited in Josef Van Ess, *Frühe Mu'tazilitische Häresiographie*. Beirut : Beiruten Text Studien, Band 11, 1971, p. 66, for version of Sa'īd b. Zayd's *ḥadīth* that includes the Prophet ; See as well Aḥmad b. Shu'aib an-Nasā'ī, *Faḍā'il aṣ-ṣaḥāba*, edited by Faruq Hamada. Morocco : Dar ath-thaqafa, 1984, p. 114-115, for version of Sa'īd b. Zayd's *ḥadīth* that excludes the Prophet.

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glance, but it acquires great importance if one takes into consideration the contexts in which these traditions often appeared, and the issue of the authority of *ḥadīth* in setting precedence and giving direction to the community of the Muslims.

In fact, these traditions were – and still are ([26]) – presented with parallel traditions in which some of the same individuals listed as belonging to the *'ashara* are represented as being the trusted favorites of the Prophet, or individuals whom he would have considered to designate as his successors. Seen in this light, these traditions take a clear anti-Shi'i coloring since they include within what might be considered to be the Prophet's "list of prospective successors" individuals who did not belong to *ahl al-bayt*. These traditions might have served at one time to justify the Qurayshis' claim to the caliphate vis-à-vis the *anṣār*, but in later centuries, their propagation can be better understood in the context of the Shi'i political and doctrinal threat to Sunnism.

The Propagandist aim of the *ḥadīth al-'ashara*

Furthermore, the fact that the different versions of *ḥadīth al-'ashara* always include at the top of their lists – or right after the Prophet Muhammad – the four *Rāshidūn* caliphs in the order of their caliphates provides a further testimony to the political aims of this *ḥadīth*. It seems to be part of a Sunni propaganda aiming at strengthening Sunni communal identity by reaffirming the legitimacy of the first three caliphs to counterbalance Shi'i claims to the contrary. This becomes certainly visible in the numerous references – in different variations – to a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet singles out the first three caliphs, and promises them paradise. Interestingly, this *ḥadīth* usually appears side by side with the *ḥadīth al-'ashara*, or heads the entries on the *ṣaḥāba* and each of the three caliphs ([27]).

This propagandist aim becomes more clear when one examines the literature on each of the ten companions, as well as the books of *faḍā'il* of the *'ashara*. In these books, the *Rāshidūn* caliphs receive the lion's share of attention. Muhib ad-Din at-Tabari, for instance, dwells on the *faḍā'il* of Abu Bakr and 'Umar for 183 and 143 pages respectively, yet covers Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas in thirteen pages and Sa'id b. Zayd in only six pages, two pages of which cover the merits of his father

(26) See the introduction to the Azhar scholar Quranī Ṭalaba Badawī's book *Jazīl al-minna fī sīrat al-mubashsharīn bi-l-janna* written by another Azhar scholar, 'Abd-al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd. In this introduction, Maḥmūd discusses the issue of the *'ashara* being from Quraysh side by side with the issue of the caliphate, and comes out with the conclusion that, had the wish of the Prophet to have the caliphate in Quraysh been observed, dissension and divisions would not have happened – *law rū'iya as-sir al-ladhī min ajlihi khuṣṣiṣat quraysh bi-l-khilāfa, lamā kāna hunāk khilāf wa-lā furqa* (See Quranī Ṭalaba Badawī, *Jamīl al-minna*, p. 8).

(27) See five different variations of a *ḥadīth* – appearing under the heading of *faḍā'il aṣ-ṣaḥāba* – according to which Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmān are promised paradise in this order, in Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, with Muḥiddīn an-Nawāwī's commentary, edited by Khalil Ma'mun Chiha. Beirut : Dar al-ma'rifa, 1994, Vol. 15, p. 166-169. See as well three variations of the same *ḥadīth* appearing under the *abwāb* of the *manāqib* of each of the three caliphs in al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, with the commentary of Kirmānī, Vol. 14, p. 215-217, 228 and 229-230.

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Zayd b. Nufayl rather than his own merits. The same could be observed in az-Zamakhshari where Abu Bakr is said to have thirty *Khāṣṣa* (characteristic merit) as opposed to only five and three for each of 'Abd ar-Rahman b. 'Awf and Sa'id b. Zayd ([28]). Thus, the authors of these accounts seem to be somewhat puzzled by the inclusion of some of these companions among the *'ashara* and the substance of what they end up writing is not very convincing.

The inclusion of the four *Rāshidūn* caliphs and of Talha, az-Zubayr, 'Abd ar-Rahman b. 'Awf, and Abu 'Ubayda b. al-Jarrah might be justifiable in view of the fact that we have several traditions in which the Prophet speaks of each of them individually in relation to their access to paradise ([29]). As well, the incorporation of Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman, 'Ali, Talha, az-Zubayr, Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas and 'Abd ar-Rahman b. 'Awf might certainly be maintained on account of their later political careers as caliphs or members of the *shūra* of 'Umar b. al-Khattab. This *shūra* has traditionally been understood to represent the six surviving companions who were most likely to succeed 'Umar, and whom 'Umar invited to come together and pick one from among themselves to succeed him. Therefore, it might not be a coincidence that – excluding Sa'id b. Zayd – the voting members of the *shūra* corresponded to the surviving companions from the list of the *'ashara*. In addition to this, there is enough evidence in the literature to suggest that – had Abu 'Ubayda been alive at the time – he would have probably been invited to join the *shūra* ([30]). The problem might certainly be resolved, in the case of Abu 'Ubayda b. al-Jarrah, if one is to accept Henri Lammens' theory of the Abu Bakr-'Umar-Abu 'Ubayda

(28) One of the three characteristics of Sa'īd b. Zayd has to do once more with the merits of his father Zayd b. Nufayl rather than Sa'īd's own virtues.

(29) These traditions include statements attributed to the Prophet in which he makes declarations to the effect of Abu Bakr being the first Muslim to enter paradise (Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, Vol. 4, p. 213), 'Umar being the first man to be taken by the right hand and led by God to paradise (Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, Vol. 1, p. 39), Abu Bakr and 'Umar being the leaders of the People of paradise (Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, Vol. 1, p. 36, 38), 'Uthman being the Prophet's companion in paradise (Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, Vol. 1, p. 40), 'Ali being the brother of the Prophet on earth and in the hereafter (at-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, Vol. 5, p. 300), Ṭalḥa being a martyr, and thus enjoying the fate of a martyr in paradise (See Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, Vol. 1, p. 46 and Kirmānī's commentary on al-Bukhārī in al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Vol. 15, p. 9) and az-Zubayr and Ṭalḥa being the neighbors of the Prophet in paradise (at-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, Vol. 5, p. 308). These statements included visions of some of the companions in paradise, such as the Prophet's vision of the castle of 'Umar in paradise (al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Vol. 14, p. 220-221 ; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Vol. 15, p. 159 ; Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, Vol. 1, p. 40 ; at-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, Vol. 5, p. 282-283). They also listed qualifications and conditions that some of the companions met and which entitled them to paradise, such as 'Uthman's buying of the Well of Rūma for the Muslims and his financing of the army of 'Usra (al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Vol. 14, p. 229), 'Abd ar-Raḥmān's excessive generosity and support of the wives of the Prophet after the death of the Prophet (at-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, Vol. 5, p. 312 and Ibn Sa'd, *aṭ-Ṭabaqāt al-kubra*. Beirut : Dar Beirut, 1978, Vol. 3, 131-133).

(30) See the *ḥadīth* attributed to 'Ā'isha in which she lists – in this order of preference – Abu Bakr, 'Umar and Abu 'Ubayda as the Prophet's choices to the caliphate in answer to the question *man kāna rasūl Allah ṣalla Allah 'alayhi wa sallam mustakhlifan law istakhlafahu ?* in Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Vol. 15, p. 149-150. See as well the *ḥadīth* attributed to 'Umar b. al-Khattab on his deathbed in which he declared that, had Abu 'Ubayda been still alive, he would have appointed him as his successor and would have been willing to defend his decision, in Ibn Sa'd, *aṭ-Ṭabaqāt*, Vol. 3, p. 413.

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triumvirate ([31]) which credits Abu 'Ubayda with playing a more important political role than what is usually portrayed in the literature. Of course the logic behind the inclusion of Sa'id b. Zayd in this listing remains unclear, and might have simply resulted from his own circulation of this *ḥadīth*. Although a study of the chains of *isnād* has not revealed any inconsistency, one cannot pass absolute judgment with regards to the timing, authenticity and exact purpose of this *ḥadīth*.

Conclusion

The fact that four of the members of the *'ashara* became caliphs, and that – at the death of 'Umar in A.H. 23 – six of the surviving seven members of the *'ashara* constituted the *shūra* which was assigned the function of choosing the next caliph from among its members, should be clear indications to the political significance of the *'ashara*, and to the community's use of this terminology to refer to its prospective leaders. Sa'id b. Zayd remains a problem. His inclusion in the listing of the *'ashara* is hard to justify on the basis of his political importance. Although he survived 'Umar by twenty-seven years, there are no accounts of his being in any way considered for the caliphate. Yet, he may have been the desired addition to complete the symbolic perfection of a ten.

In any case, it should be clear by now that the members of this group of ten served by their deeds, their virtues, and their status as the ideal leadership the Sunni community was looking for. The constant reference to them should be understood as reflecting the desire of that community to define this leadership by the collective example of these men.

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(31) See Henri Lammens, "Le Triumvirat Aboû Bakr, Omar et Aboû 'Obaida", *Mélanges de la Faculté Orientale*, 1910, p. 113-144.

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